研究動態

"Women Studies with Chinese Characteristics?" On the Origins, Issues, and Theories of Contemporary Feminist Research in China

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Ever since the mid-1980s, intellectual life in the PRC has been quite astir. A few academic publications on women-related issues had earlier appeared, and by then, the call for women studies as an independent branch of scholarship was heard. A number of conferences, periodicals, book series, and new research facilities were held, or founded, which have already yielded preliminary results in the field, indicating that women studies are now one of China's popular "hot topics" *remen huati* 熱門話題. One may well speak of a "second phase" in Chinese feminist studies.

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The first phase had been limited to a relatively short period in the 1920s and 30s. During the anti-Japanese, and subsequent civil wars, women studies, like most other research, came to a near standstill. After the founding of the PRC, they were put under state supervision, remaining a marginal issue within the scientific body as a whole.

In this paper I shall introduce current women studies in China, their origins, concerns, and concepts. In order to avoid overgeneralization, I shall confine myself to the PRC. (Although in Taiwan and Hong Kong, Chinese women research flourishes as well, it is there conducted before different backgrounds and upon different premises.) My following remarks should expound how closely linked women studies are with current problems and theories concerning women's liberation. Consequently, an introductory review such as this must take into consideration the social background of women studies in China as well as theories of social and female liberation. First, it will be shown how "female problems", debated during the reform period, required a fresh discussion of the issue (ch.1), and how women studies have developed into a new branch of institutionalized research (ch.2). In a theoretical passage, significant lines of current women studies will be singled out and defined, relating to the Women's Association, on the one hand (ch.3), and the best-known representative of independent women studies, Li Xiaojiang 李小江, on the other (ch.4). A few ideas on the characteristics of Chinese women research will conclude this paper (ch.5).

Chinese women studies are mainly, but not exclusively, carried out by female researchers. It is therefore understood that when I speak of research personnel, I refer to a mixed-gender group with a higher portion of female than male participants.

1. Social backgrounds of the second phase of Chinese

women studies - The formation of "female problems" (*funü wenti* 婦女問題)

Following the Marxist classics, it became generally understood in China that the basic prerequisite for women's liberation was female labour outside the family home, i.e. economic independence. With the socialist revolution, this ideal seemed to have been realized in principle. The 1954 constitution formally stipulated equal rights for men and women. In practice, too, a very high female labour rate was enforced by state distribution of jobs. Thus, a 1990 "Survey of the social status of women" carried out by the Women's Association and the National Statistics Bureau revealed that of all women aged 18-64, 87.2% were employed. Even if this was still 9.8% less than the employment rate for men, it meant an increase of 20.7% over the preceding generation of women. In the age group below 40, only 5.2% of the women covered by the survey were housewives as opposed to 27.5% in the previous generation. (*Zhongguo funü shehui diwei diaocha ketizu* 中國婦女社會地位調查課題組 1992:22) China could boast world leadership, as far as international female employment rates were concerned. (Liu Bohong 1992:312)

However, these figures must not obscure the fact that at the same time, achievements in the struggle for equal employment were already being curtailed again. Although as yet no data covering all of China existed, certain individual cases revealed how women were threatened with becoming victims of reform policies. The reform measures launched in late 1978 may be summarized as an introduction of elements of market-economy. Doubtlessly, those measures, particularly their application to the industrial sector, advanced economic progress. However, negative concomitants did occur, mainly felt by women. In short: as far as authorization of reform measures for increased production efficiency in the "work units" was concerned (e.g. reorganization or even elimination

of non-profit making businesses; partial abolition of state-controlled job distribution; and particularly the spread of private businesses who, unlike state enterprises, did not provide their employees with social security), it were first and foremost women who had to withdraw from employment. This was due to the fact that, because of longer absence periods owing to pregnancy and child care, women were unable to measure up to male competition.

In 1988, two spectacular events triggered fears of future developments and started the so-called debate on "women returning home" (*funü huijia* 婦女回家). The debate, carried out in the journal "*Chinese Women*" (*Zhongguo funü* 中國婦女), soon spread far beyond. The two events were, a) the fate of the worker Li Jing 黎靜; and b) the case of the women from Daqiong 大邱 village.

Li Jing, aged 37, described her plight in a letter to the editor of "*Chinese Women*" as follows: The factory where she had worked had cut jobs in order to increase efficiency, promising sacked workers continued pay of 80% of their wages. However, 90% of those who lost their jobs were, like Li Jing herself, women with children who had been a burden to the factory because of their more frequent absences. In her letter, Li Jing explains her devotion to both job and family during her years of employment, in contrast to the financial straights and loss of self-esteem oppressing her now that she was a mere housewife. (Li Jing 1988)

As for the second case, Daqiong village had profited from the reforms, abandoning monoculture grain farming and engaging in new economic sectors which included industry and trade, while also introducing modern business administration. The villagers had grown rich. As a side-effect, Daqiong women retired from their jobs by large numbers. Once reform policies were introduced to the village, ① a mere 16% of all its

① Unfortunately, no precise date is given.

married women under 45 remained in employment, while 84% now lived as housewives. ②

Unlike Li Jing, these country women had volunteered to return home, as this seemed the only escape from their heavy double burden of housework *plus* job. In view of the general economic boom, households were able to do without a second wage earner. Still, observers of this trend asked themselves why the villagers necessarily had to return to the traditional pattern of "men outside (in society), women inside (at home)" (*nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei* 男主外, 女主内). Were there really no other solutions to the problem of double burden? (Zhang Juan & Ma Wenrong 1988)

In the ensuing debate, this problem was tackled in different ways. Consent seemed to exist that both the double burden and the endangered status of working women in their units were due to the fact that China's level of development was still too low. On the one hand, it was argued, such a low level accounted for housework to be heavy manual labour, and thus a real burden; on the other, production units, still struggling for mere survival, were not yet able to afford the social expenses needed to help women stay on the job in spite of pregnancy and child rearing. Some articles, however, stated that this was an inevitable situation, wherefore women ought to forgo employment. - The following arguments were put forth: Since women's liberation presupposed a high level of economic development, its realization, in China, had been premature; in their productivity output, women lacked far behind men, while the principle of competition now in force meant that the weak had to withdraw; women were to make sacrifices for the benefit of the entire nation. Even the notion of housework as the natural domain of woman was put forth: as

② No compatible data are provided for the pre-reform period; it is said that then, more than 95% of *all* Daqiong women worked in production.

the argument went, only the present phenomenon of her return to the family home actually meant true female liberation. (Liu Bohong 1992: 324ff)

Other theoreticians - above all the Women's Association and researchers of women studies unattached to the Association - were not as ready to relinquish the ideal of full female participation in society. They investigated into the new difficulties and rendered "female problems" the object of scientific surveys. Some of them actually found it necessary to question the paradigm of a realization of women's liberation by the socialist revolution, and to thoroughly redefine "woman" as an issue. - This was the origin of the second phase of Chinese women studies. ③

"Female problems" has now turned into a standard term, connoting numerous phenomena related to female discrimination. The problematique focuses around women's weak position in such production units as have opened up to competition. Besides, that weak stance is also obvious from the poor employment auspices female university graduates are facing. Other "female problems" include the low rate of women in politics; high mortality rate of female babies; prostitution; women-trade; high rate of female illiteracy; etc.

2. The institutional frame of woman studies - The Women's Association and non-government institutions

The "All-Chinese Women's Association" is a mass organization of the PRC under direction by the CCP. At last, as late as in the mid-1980s, it was compelled to give scientific attention to the new situation and problems of women in the reform period. In the first half of the 1980s, it had at

③ This is corroborated by Chinese researchers who place the origins of Chinese women studies in the reform period, e.g. Tan Shen 1992a:55, and Chen Ping 1992:24.

best tackled traditional issues of women research such as the history of the women's movement, hygiene, marriage and the family. (Li Jingzhi 1992:567ff) But ever since 1985, the provincial Women's Associations swiftly created a number of research groups called upon to deal with a broad range of issues summarized as "women studies" (*funüxue* 婦女學), or "women theory" (*funülilun* 婦女理論). About half of the new institutions, however, continued to confine themselves to marriage and the family, or to the new "female questions". (Li Jingzhi 1992:571f) Below, we will explain this relatively narrow research range.

The Women's Association boasts of its pioneering rôle in women studies, a claim which does smack of monopolization. In 1984 and 1986, the first nationwide research conferences on "female problems" were held. Further provincial conferences followed, whose contributions were published in anthologies. In 1990, the Women's Association founded the first institute of women studies (*funü yanjiusuo* 婦女研究所)which, as of March 1992, has been publishing the quarterly "*Funü yanjiu luncong* 婦女研究論叢" (English subtitle "Collection of Women's Studies") - in fact the first national women's magazine assuming a scientific level. It openly states that the Women's Association aims at a leading rôle in Chinese women studies on Marxist-Leninist principles. (Fakanci 1992) Since 1992, the Peking Women's Association has been publishing the journal "*Nüxing yanjiu* 女性研究" (English subtitle "Women's Studies") whose internal predecessor, "*Funü yanjiu* 婦女研究", had been the first truly academic women's magazine of the PRC.④ (Li Jingzhi 1992: 574ff)

Researchers unattached to the Women's Association, too, were roused by the new female problems. It caused them deep concern that women seemed to be left behind in the reform period with its general mood of departure. Now that the Maoist levelling of gender rôles was a thing of

④ Meanwhile, the journal has changed its character; see the review in this paper.

the past, the issue of "woman" burst forth with a vengeance. Since 1985, generating from initiatives by individual women, a network of independent (*minjian*民間)women's organizations was formed where women scrutinized and discussed their social stance, history, and self-awareness. Of course, such new, self-confident readiness for critical discussion of the reform process must be seen in connection with the all-over enthusiasm preceding the opposition movement of 1989. After all, it were not only women who redefined their role in society. Thus, an observer of these new independent female organizations placed them within a general democratization process of society: "Owing to the acceleration of China's reform, opening, and democratization processes, the citizens' democratic consciousness and the idea of [civil] rights increased constantly; mass organizations were extraordinarily active in contributing to the modernization of socialism. The inofficial women's organizations, as well, developed before this very background of the period." (Liu Jinxiu 1991:113)

A number of discussion forums sprang up in the course of this movement, such as conferences, periodicals, lectures etc. It had been started from Zhengzhou in 1985 by Ms Li Xiaojiang, professor of European literature at Zhengzhou University. In 1985, she founded a "women's study society" (*funü xuehui* 婦女學會). In the same year, she invited researchers of various disciplines to Zhengzhou for a women studies conference, and in 1987 she established the first academic women research centre of the PRC at Zhengzhou University.

In other cities, too, scholars organized non-official discussion and study circles. As early as 1985, signalling the new trend, such groups gathered at the Peking Foreign Languages College, and in Changsha. In the course of the democratization movement of 1988, they emerged as "salons", or under other names, at the Tianjin Central Party College and at Shanghai Fudan University. Another women's salon in Shanghai, called

"*Shanghai funü shalong* 上海婦女沙龍", brought together members from all social strata by extra large numbers. Discussions and activities carried out by all such groups apparently focused on current problems of women. (Liu Jinxiu 1991:107ff)

The events of June, 1989, had their stifling repercussions in women research, as well, particularly concerning formal organization. The "salons" had to close down if they hoped to avoid suspicion of supporting the opposition movement. In October 1989, the State Council banned all inofficial research institutions.

This did not deter women from making personal efforts in pursuit of Chinese women studies and of new organizational forms. They have by now succeeded, at least at some universities, to obtain permission for the set-up of special interdisciplinary women studies centres. It remains to be seen as to what an extent such institutionalization (i.e. depcndence on a government unit) is going to obstruct research.

Besides, we must not overlook the fact that at some universities, the occasional women-related topic has made its way into research and instruction of various academic disciplines.

Let us now take a look at the issues of current women studies in the PRC. Two major trends have to be distinguished: First, the work of the Women's Association, which again must be subdivided into a small group of orthodox theoreticians who adhere closely to party lines, on the one hand, and a majority of researchers who seem to feel less bound by orthodox loyalties, on the other. Secondly, the work carried out by Ms Li Xiaojiang, who initiated women studies unattached to the Women's Association and was, at the same time, the only researcher to offer a comprehensive draft for women studies.

Singling out these currents, we may ask the following questions:

1. Theory. How do researchers define the past and present status of

women in society? Which theories of women's liberation do they uphold? How do they explain current female problems?

2. Methodology and purposes of women studies.
3. Comparison and/or relations with western women studies.

3. Female problems, women's liberation theory, and women studies in the view of the Women's Association

As mentioned earlier, the Women's Association, since the mid-1980s, gave licence to a broader range of issues than before. By now, the Association's publications show a stunning variety in defining tasks and perspectives of women studies. Furthermore, we may assume that the practical work of the Association varies from place to place, with differing degrees of liberty.

And yet, it is obvious that an attempt at monopolizing Chinese women studies is made by the Association's headquarters, i.e. an attempt at reinforcing orthodox Marxist women theories, although the group of researchers I call orthodox seems relatively small. Their publications deal mainly with past and present problems of Marxist women's liberation theories and their Sinicization, appearing in the Party-owned "*Qiushi* 求是" as well as the already mentioned journal "*Funü yanjiu luncong*". My following remarks refer particularly to two articles by an author named Luo Jing, published in 1986 and 1992 respectively.

In general, all Chinese theoreticians rely for their approaches on Marxist women theories. Any such theory is bound to express a clear opinion on feminism. Still, it remains a crucial point whether the historical status of women is sufficiently explained by the "class" category, or whether it is additionally, or even exclusively, dependent on that of "gender". For example, is exploitation of female workers in capitalism due to their

membership of the proletariat, or to that of the female sex?⑤

Luo Jing apparently accepts only the class category. She assumes that classical Marxism was basically right in declaring women's liberation dependent on the success of the proletarian revolution, and in regarding female employment, i.e. economic independence, as preconditional for female liberation. For Luo, equal rights just about define that liberation. In the PRC, the objective had been generally attained as early as in the "phase of socialist reconstruction", i.e. by the end of 1956. Thus, the socialist revolution principally solved the female question. (Luo Jing 1986:29) Luo looks at the present situation as positive, while even she cannot entirely deny the occurrence of women's problems today. In her view, these problems reveal the fact that equality has not yet been fully realized. They are therefore merely quantitative.

On the one hand, Luo sees the origins of female problems in the economic situation, viz. backwardness, of the PRC. On the other, the author discerns a lack of consciousness regarding equality. This, she claims, is due not to the socialist system itself but to "feudal vestiges" and capitalist influences. Therefore, the measures she suggests for an enforcement of equal rights include, above all, propaganda and educational efforts, apart from resolute action against breaches of female rights. Finally, she pleads for a "raise of quality" (*tigao suzhi* 提高素質)of women in order to improve their competetive auspices. The means will have to be state-supported social institutions (nurseries, kindergartens, homes for the elderly) apt to remove women's burdens. (Luo Jing 1992:11f)

Since Luo assumes the "gender" category to play no decisive role, past or present, it is but logical that she denies the need for special women studies. Thus, she generally talks about "research of female problems"

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⑤ For an excellent introduction into the problematique of Marxist-feminist theories, cf. Barrett 1990.

(*funü wenti yanjiu* 婦女問題研究), or "women's liberation theory" (*funü jiefang lilun* 婦女解放理論), but not about women studies. (Luo Jing 1986) ⑥

To which purpose, then, does the orthodox group (represented by Luo Jing) assign the study of women, name it whatever? As already mentioned, a major task will have to be an academic understanding of female problems, i.e. to explain their origins, and show ways for a full realization of women's rights.

In addition, such scholarship will have to study ways in which women may be functionalized for certain tasks set by the Party. In the view of these theoreticians, it has been, and remains, correct and necessary for the women's movement to join ranks with the CCP in order to attain the Party's overall social objectives. Women are defined by their function (*zuoyong* 作用) within society. This term always connotes obligation as well as devotion. (Huang Qizao 1992:6)

Take for example the most recent target of women studies. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping declared the PRC'S preeminent task to be the development and liberation of the productive forces. These forces include human labour, half of which is female labour.

Women studies are to investigate by means of various disciplines how woman as a "resource" (*ziyuan* 資源) can be exploited, how her "quality" can be improved in view of the all-over social development, e.g. by teaching her modern know-how and technologies. (Tsao Chunfang 1992:13) The relevant disciplines are clearly practice-oriented, viz. sociology, psychology, ethnography, or pedagogy, as well as some others which are not recognized

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⑥ Luo Jing rejects the term women studies especially in view of the fact that its proponents trace it to the achievements of the 1960s women's movement in the USA, thereby grossly relativating those of Marxist women's liberation theory. (Luo Jing 1986:30)

as independent disciplines in the west, like ethics or the so-called "study of the development of female talent." (*funü rencaixue* 婦女人才學)

How does this line relate to western women studies? It emphasizes a specifically Chinese theory of women, or, in their term, "women's liberation theory with Chinese characteristics"(*juyou Zhongguo tese de funü jiefang lilun* 具有中國特色的婦女解放理論) obviously alluding to the term, "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" as a description of China's social system. (Huang Qizao 1992:7) Other terms describe a women theory meeting "Chinese national singularities" (*Zhongguo guoqing* 中國國情), or a "Siniczed"(*Zhongguohua* 中國化) one. (Fakanci 1992, Shi Qiaolan & Li Xingzhi 1992)

Articles on the history of the Chinese women's movement expound how even during the early years of the Chinese communist movement, Marxist women theory was already Sinicized. Space forbids me to recite details. When those articles mention "Sinicization", they imply an adjustment of the objective of the women's movement to the respective revolutionary strategy of the CCP which, as we know, is understood as Sinicized Marxism. (Liu Jucai 1992, Shi Qiaolan & Li Xingzhi 1992)

While the orthodox group makes a point of expounding the above-mentioned issues, a majority of researchers attached to the Women's Association show little interest in theoretical problems. They accept Marxism as the theory of social development without challenging its views on female liberation. Neither do they regard current problems as phenomena of a specific form of female exploitation. However, they do not focus on theoretical reflections but rather on women studies proper, i.e. academic research into concrete female problems and their origins.

Their various attempts at systematization of women studies differ only insofar as some researchers of this second group enquire strictly into female problems while others pay attention to a broader issue of "woman".

(Ding Juan 1992:197ff) In both cases, women studies are defined by their *object* - female problems, women - rather than by their *method.* Only occasionally, women studies are defined as a new way of thinking, a new epistemological perspective, but even such fleeting definitions are not consistently employed. Neither have they found their way into any concrete research projects. (Tan Shen 1992a:53, Yu Yan 1992:2) This group is obviously not ready to launch a sweeping attack against the entire academic apparatus and its disciplines, such as western feminism is now calling for.

Women studies are now conducted within the single disciplines as "branches" of them (*xueke fenzhi* 學科分支). (Yu Yan 1992:3, Chen Ping 1992:22, Li Meige 1992:81 & 93, Luo Qunying 1992:95) As for methodology, they are independent, i.e. the history of women must employ the methods of historiography (not defined); female sociology, the methods of that specific field; etc.⑦ All texts, however, reveal insecurity about terms such as "theory" or "methodology". Apart from the term, "branch of scholarship", we come across interdisciplinary definitions of women studies which are shaped by the complex issue of "female problems". Here, two terms are applied, viz. "fringe science" (*bianyuan xueke* 邊緣學科), i.e. issues such as marriage, family, etc., combining fringe concerns of various academic disciplines, (Luo Qunying 1992:96) and "universal science" (*zonghe xueke* 綜合學科).

What is the attitude of this group of researchers towards the problem of Sinicization? Chineseness is in many instances being emphasized under the term, "localixation" (*bentuhua*本土化). (Adopted from Taiwan, it has an academic ring to it, as opposed to the term, "Sinicization", known from the ideological debate.) But why ever should China develop its own

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⑦ This follows from descriptions of the individual disciplines of women studies, e.g. Yu Yan 1992, Chen Ping 1992, Tan Shen 1992a, etc.

women studies? Although Chinese women researchers acknowledge their western colleagues' superiority with regard to theory and methodology, they discern, and are unwilling to bend to, westerncentric interests and approaches, as well as a certain arrogance. The most frequent argument is that Chinese women's social and cultural backgrounds differ fundamentally from those of women in western industrialized countries. (Tan Shen 1992b) ⑧

Still, if we look at these articles for any concrete Sinicization procedures of women studies, we fail to find satisfactory answers. This is particularly true for the one detailed text on the issue that has so far come to my notice, corroborating the impression I formed in various personal conversations, that the peculiarity of Chinese circumstances is a much repeated stereotype. Nothing indicates where precisely lie. the differences in the situation of Chinese and western women . Instead, research methods are listed which I think I may summarize as, "Back to the sources, back to the facts". A theoretico-analytical perspective of the existing material is sadly lacking. (Tan Shen 1992b)

If Chinese women studies do indeed confess to the creed, "Back to the sources, back to the facts", it is understandable why their current output covers mainly the following two areas:

1. Opinion polls and statistics concerning the issue of female problems. Only a few of the numerous questions and topics may here be cited: The ratio between employment rates and educational levels of women; problems concerning family planning, e.g. in which way do income, job, education, etc. influence the wish for a child; the new group of career women; the decline of education for girls in rural areas; the increase of divorce rates in the cities; etc.

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⑧ In personal talks, this argument was predominant.

2. Editions of source materials and study aids such as sources for the history of the Chinese women's movement, or biographical dictionaries. In articles and monographs, a reorganization of source materials is attempted for narrowly defined sections of women studies.

4. Li Xiaojiang's draft of Marxist feminist research

In 1979, Li Xiaojiang took up her graduate studies in European letters. Soon, she specialized in female personages of fiction, as well as in female writers. Her interest widened to embrace women in general. The fact that her most significant contributions to women studies up to now are of a theoretical nature is due to her philosophical predilections. In 1983, she published her first respective article, "Human progress and women's liberation", which won her ferocious criticism from the Party, but also first contacts with other academic women to whom her new approach towards the problem of women's liberation appealed.⑨

Subsequently, Li Xiaojiang put down her views on women studies in numerous articles which, in their turn, form the contents of two monographs representing her major work up to now:

1. A systematic survey of women studies, "Eve under survey – Draft for a theory of women studies" (Li Xiaojiang 1988);
2. A book dealing with female problems during the reform period, "Women's escape – On Chinese women in the second half of the 20th century" (Li Xiaojiang 1989a).

Let us first take a look at Li Xiaojiang's theoretical premises.

Li explicitly understands her work as an attempt at establishing a Marxist feminist theory, but her argumentative approach is largely independent. If she looks for support at all, she does so in Marx's and

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⑨ For biographical data, I refer to an interview with Li Xiaojiang, Berlin, December 1991; cf. Spakowski 1992a, 1992b.

Engels's original works, not in contemporary theories of Marxist feminism. She even speaks of the necessity for a development of classical Marxism which, she claims, was a product of its own times that fails to answer contemporary conditions sufficiently. In the days of Marx and Engels, the gender problem was superimposed by class considerations, which explains why classical Marxism yielded no independent feminist theory. (Li Xiaojiang 1987:21f) Today, on the other hand, class contradictions are diminishing, while female problems push forth vigorously. (Li Xiaojiang 1989b:19) By now, the "gender" category is subjugating that of "class". It can no longer be claimed that the socialist revolution solved, once for all, the female question. What is needed in our times is a "scientification" (*kexuehua* 科學化) of the female issue on the grounds of Historical Materialism, as well as the establishment of women studies as a new academic discipline (*xuekehua* 學科化) (Li Xiaojiang 1987:22).

Li explains the status and/or suppression of women primarily by their sex, only secondarily by their affiliation to any class. (Li Xiaojiang 1988:37ff) Compared with publications of the Women's Association, this seems outright revolutionary. In Li's view, the history of women differs substantially from social history as a whole, thus even requiring its own chronology; the familiar representation of *human* history - the succession of five formations from primary society up to socialism - was in fact largely *male* history, since it were men alone who bore production and determined society. Throughout most of history, women were responsible exclusively for biological reproduction, being locked in their families and belonging to men. The changes society underwent concerned them only indirectly. The crucial point is that as women, they were objects of men. It is of secondary importance whether a husband belonged to the aristocracy, the proletariat, etc.

Li classifies the history of women into three phases of development,

viz. the age of matriarchy (*muxć shidai* 母系時代); the age of slavery (*nuli shidai* 奴隸時代); and the age of liberation (*jiefang shidai* 解放時代).

During matriarchy, women held a higher social position because they were the ones who guaranteed the then fundamental task and foremost objective of mankind, viz. bare survival, procreation. (Li Xiaojiang 1988:44f)

The bells for slavery were tolling when men claimed rights based on the family as a social form (among others, the right of property which in its turn called for manifest hereditary relationships; or social rights). (Li Xiaojiang 1988:45) Along with the formation of the family went a distinct division of labour among the sexes: economic production became the province of man, biological reproduction that of woman, who was thereby excluded from society. (Li Xiaojiang 1988:46)

The most interesting part of Li's treaty is the passage on the age of liberation. Both in western capitalist countries and in socialist China, Li claims, it has already begun, although borne by different forces. Neither system, however, has already accomplished the task of liberation.

For Li Xiaojiang, as well, women's entry into society, i.e. into the working population, is a major prerequisite for their liberation. In the west, industrialization, with its increased demand for cheap labour, created social conditions under which women were drawn into society. But this occurred by no means out of respect for them, let alone out of concern for their liberation itself. (Li Xiaojiang 1988:46) Rather, women had to struggle for equal rights on their own, against men. Thus was formed the women's rights movement which gained, step by strenuous step, social equality. (Li Xiaojiang 1987:20)

In China, female liberation took a different course, as here it was the socialist revolution which, all at once, helped women to formal

equality, as well as actually leading them out of the family into society. However, in that specific Chinese way of liberation, two factors are seen as problematical:

First, the low economic level of social development. Li regards the resulting problems - the drudgery of everyday life and housework; the trend of rationalisation to expel, first of all, women from employment - much in the same light as the above-quoted theoreticians. Therefore, she likewise considers female liberation inseparable from overall social progress, viz. the development of the productive forces. Since the entire society is faced with this task, it must, needless to say, be carried out by men as well as women. (Li Xiaojiang 1989b:23f)

Interestingly, Li's second point differs from the positions held by the Women's Association in that she seems to demand a specific female identity. Li's doubts in the Chinese way of women's liberation also rest in the problematical fact that women did not themselves struggle for equality but received it from above, under condition, that is, of their assimilation (*tonghua* 同化) to the world of men. Today's women lack both a specifically female "subject consciousness"(*nüxing zhuti yishi* 女性主體意識) and "group-consciousness"(*nüxing qunti yishi* 女性群體意識). Women's liberation, according to Li, is not to be equated with assimilating the values of an androcentric society. Instead, women ought to grow conscious of their special character and strive for their self-determined development within society. This is the more indispensable in times like the present when they can no longer rely on the help of society; then, they must fight for their rights as a group. (Li Xiaojiang 1989b:27)

The demand for self-determined development leads to another point which shows most clearly how wide the gap is between the Women's Association and Li Xiaojiang. For in Li's eyes, the enforcement of equal rights alone does not yet signify the attainment of women's liberation.

Rather, it is part and parcel of the liberation of the entire human race, indicating as it does a new relationship between individual and society. While, according to the Women's Association, women must develop in order to support social targets set by the Party, Li's vision transcends the present social system, which still has to be called androcentric. To her, the measure of human - therefore also male - liberation is an acceptance of the value of individual life, the possibility of full self-determined development of the individual. After all, Li's social draft states, the individual does not exist for society, but it is society who must provide the best possible conditions for the unfolding of the individual. Thus, Li does not merely demand a cure for certain isolated problems of a limited part of the population. What others may belittle as "female problems", or even attribute to the weakness of women, Li describes as "problems of society" (*shehui wenti* 社會問題), problems installed within the social system itself. (Li Xiaojiang 1989b:18)

As for women studies, Li fixes far-reaching objectives. In her view, the survey of female problems is only one issue among others, falling under the responsibility of sociologists. In her systematic draft of Marxist women studies, she distinguishes three large fields: First, theory - meaning determination of the laws of women's development; Secondly, the single disciplines concerned, viz. female anthropology, history, sociology, aesthetics, etc; Thirdly, so-called female futuristics (*funü weilaixue* 婦女未來學), a field which, relying on the other two, is to determine characteristics of the present and future situation of women in order to guide them along. (Li Xiaojiang 1988:88ff)

In a more recent article, however, Li leaves behind her 1988 definition of women studies according to their research *object*. In 1991, she called for a truly feminist perspective even in Chinese women studies - in her own words, a "revolution of methodology (*fangfalun geming* 方法論革

命). She demands a fresh reflection on, and rearrangement of the entire humanities, history of civilization, and way of human existence, under the new perspective of "persons with a sex". (*you xing de ren* 有性的人) (Li Xiaojiang 1991:4f)

How about Li's attitude towards Sinicization?

I only know of her remarks on the peculiarities of the Chinese women's movement and liberation theories, but of no statements concerning women studies. The above-mentioned remarks may be summarized as follows:

1. The Chinese women's movement is not going to take the road of individual liberation pursued by the western female-rights movement, ⑩ because Chinese women still bear strong imprints of traditional qualities, e.g., above all, their sense of responsibility towards the family. In addition, anti-individualism, being deeply rooted in the Chinese national character, takes its effects.
2. The Chinese women's movement will be quite moderate. It will not turn against men, because in China, the suppression of women never reached the western dimensions of anti-female disdain. Moreover, the struggle for equal rights in China has always been supported by men. (Li Xiaojiang 1988:174ff)

5. Conclusion

Before I close with a few observations on the problem of the peculiarities of Chinese women studies, I wish to summarize my preceding

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⑩ This seems to contradict Li's opinion that true human liberation should be reached once the individual will have attained the possibility of self-determined development. In the given context, however, Li apparently alludes to the socialist term of individual freedom, while in her remark on the Chinese women's movement, she tries to distance herself from bourgeois individualism. Moreover, Li, who is very pragmatic, seems unable to envisage any individual liberation (of what coinage ever) in China's near future.

ideas.

In response to the new, critical situation of women during the reform period, Chinese women researchers felt compelled to re-examine the issue of "women's liberation". Departing from current problems, women studies developed into a new branch of scholarship, while its definitions vary. Provisionally, two tendencies may be singled out: An orthodox Marxist one, upheld by the Women's Association, defining the suppression of women as part of class suppression, therefore regarding the current problems as merely quantitative ones (although divergences occur within the Association, particularly concerning the scope of women studies); and the independent Marxist one by Li Xiaojiang who opens herself to feminist theories, explaining the suppression of women by their sex instead of subsuming it under class struggle. Defining contemporary China as an androcentric society, Li envisages the advent of a liberated humanity transcending the present social system. Her comprehensive draft for women studies, engaging nearly all academic disciplines, reconsiders "woman" as an issue and seems to aim at a new definition that no longer views the research object as decisive, but rather the method, viz. sex-oriented research. ⑪

However, all Chinese researchers in the field seem to share strong reservations against western women studies and the feminist movement, apparently fearing domination. Almost all articles and discussions express the necessity of Sinicization. In conclusion, I may therefore ask: Do Chinese women studies live up to their vehement postulate? What precisely are the peculiarities of Chinese women research?

To begin with, it was only after exchange with western feminism that Chinese researchers felt urged to Sinicize women studies, as for them,

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⑪ This paragraph was slightly abbreviated by the trl.

western research with its culturally distinct approaches and theories based on a different background could not be acceptable.

Still, in my view the claim for Sinicization has not yet been redeemed, as far as theory and methodology are concerned. Hardly any alternative concepts can be made out. Doubtlessly, this goes back to the great insecurity concerning theory and methodology which has been prevailing throughout Chinese scholarship ever since the late 1980s. True: the obligation to rely on Marxism-Leninism and its theory of social development was relaxed, but the negative experience of Chinese scholars with such all-embracing models resulted in a certain weariness of theory. Of course, this takes effect in their perception of western China-related women studies, as well. For the time being, the only way out for Chinese researchers seems to be their return "back to the facts, back to the sources".

But perhaps, comprehensive theoretical concepts on the female issue are not to be expected of them. Because - as I hope I made clear - the truly specific traits of Chinese women studies are precisely, 1. their strong tendency towards solutions of practical problems, ⑫ and 2. the fact that the female issue, although reexamined, is apparently not understood as the main contradiction in Chinese society. Even Li Xiaojiang, who may well be regarded as a feminist social critic, holds the solution of female problems primarily dependent on overall social progress.

Thus it seems that the most pressing problems of the reform period - inflation, new income gradients, population trends, political reforms, etc. - concern men and women alike in their critical dispute with the state leadership. Possibly because of this critical impetus, men do not regard women's new agility as threatening. Indeed, one cannot help suspecting at times that women studies, being less conspicuous than political or

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⑫ This feature is always stressed by Chinese women researchers themselves, e.g. Tan Shen 1992a:57, Luo Qunying 1992:95.

social studies, are providing a platform for the condensed build-up of a comprehensive, critical awakening.

Incidentally, a glance at Taiwan's women studies confirms the pragmatic tendency of Chinese women research and its close links with a general drive towards political and social reforms.⑬

And yet, as opposed to Li Xiaojiang, I should not explain those traits of Chinese women studies by a typically Chinese national character. The feminist movements of other developing countries are likewise marked by practice-oriented features.⑭ A sensible perspective for Chinese women studies seems to me, therefore, the exchange with countries of a similar level of development. In this instant, the term, "women studies with Chinese characteristics" ought to be substituted by one that explains the peculiarities of Chinese women research before its specific social background, viz. a society in the process of modernization.

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⑬ Cf. Ku Yen-lin 1989, passim.

⑭ "In this, the 'sisters' in the Third World usually differ from American and European women's liberators: When they fight for *their place* in society, this means not so much the place of 'woman' but rather that of every human being as such." (Gesquiere-Peitz 1988:168)

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